

Locative Media Workshop at PixelACHE: 'Negotiating Rautatieasema'

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Orientation in the field. Fuzz your vision so that you are focusing on what you can hear not only now, but what happened a moment, a minute, an afternoon, a year, decades before.

As individuals and as small groups. Leaning, moving, sitting, pausing, tracing, and questioning are more or less unusual behaviours. Some of these actions are negotiated with security guards, the station manager, travellers, other on-lookers, and those doing similar things. Finding the right communication channels. Contact microphones applied to social relations are revealing when you sit still, fall asleep, wander round, draw with chalk and paint your face, or indeed, when you consult library books.

Different levels of engagement. All have different authoritative bodies, purposes, contexts, histories and passageways, which spread offering multi-dimensional directions. Location overlaying location overlaying location - and that is just indoors. Focus upon what lies beneath the surface, not spread around, lost in the passing crowd scattered with footsteps, rail timetables, and your movement onto the next part of your journey.

Stop the process in motion. Identify the node of transition and within a certain time period (this might have to be negotiated): what is the deposition? Close to the ground scratches, scrapes and heels on the stone floor. You capture photographs of the situation and collect debris. You write notes about the fragments, before wrapping them up and placing them in plastic zip-lock bags. These items are part of the flow and agency that is around - traces of movement, transaction and consumption.

And for a moment, stop yourself in motion. What are you doing? How do you feel? What do you remember from another time and place? Why are you going? Ask these questions without spinning round. Listen inside to your feelings and then you can make a map. Sit calmly, feel comfortable with yourself being there, comfortable with others around you too.

You are not the first, you know, to take a deep breath at that spot, recognising an historical event. Consider the continuity of a sound which has existed over and over. Combine it with what you experience now. Facts in historical journals and storyteller's words spoken-out-loud can be compared. If you are aware of what is there, events collapse through time.

Occasionally special events collapse through cultural space. And for the first time a new language is spoken in public announcement. Should you mind who are listening? No, it can point at least a few in fresh directions along their journey, loosening social boundaries that exist harder than tape on the floor. You look for common pathways to co-inhabiting spaces. You sit down on the floor with the others, claiming some space that did not have description before (these descriptions can of course be used to confuse).

Precise but ephemeral things. You make a mark that does not exist now. You attract attention in your action, observed for a period of time, and the shadow and the observer is gone with their own memory of the occasion. You place texts in a throw-away place, a moment quickly passed through to encourage reflection. In everyday life philosophical placards are removed. Walking, they say, helps you think. You wish for an enrichment of human emotion, lasting impressions and connections. I think about you all the time.

The locative media workshop in Helsinki (23rd March-3rd April 2004) as part of the pixelACHE festival, aimed to invite and include the situated, the embodied, and the temporal in a discourse dominated by the spatial relation. The above paragraphs weave together an amalgamation of processes and practices engaged in by workshop participants, distilled as a creative and performative text [*].

The workshop was a community of interest, where members of different communities of practice come together. In this case, an international group of artists, writers, and researchers with disciplines of expression ranging from textual, aural, digital image and film, performance, and contemporary archaeological theory.

This gathering joined the local (Helsinki-based) participants of the 'signal | process' workshop/exhibition led by sonic media artist Sophea Lerner (AU/FI). Already ongoing for 2 weeks, this interdisciplinary workshop explored issues of sound in public space through site-specific processes and engagements.

Both workshops shared a production base at the MUU gallery. Both workshops shared a locus of site engagement: the interior building, subterranean and surrounding area of the Rautatieasema (railway station) in central Helsinki. Ad-hoc and self-organising, collaborations between the local and international participants of both workshops formed according to collective interest, individual skills and knowledge.

The deep-local Helsinki culture of mobility, systems and networks is manifested at the site of Rautatieasema. With its interior, exterior, surrounding subterranean public-spaces, it is a centre-point of urban Finland; A cartographic and temporal framework for partings, convergences, paths and destinations, all wrapped up in objective data and personal story. The tangible, intangible, physical and informatic.. The static and mobile..

The building itself, designed by Eliel Saarinen in 1916 was accredited as the 'prime expression' of National Romanticism, while its clock tower at 160ft later became a sign of modern Helsinki. For the 1000's of people moving from the countryside to the city from the 1950's onwards, it was a symbol of the hope for a better life. In contemporary times, similar but maybe less

dramatic travels and transitions continue. Rautatieasema area is the main focal point of human and city rail, tram and bus traffic: to work for commuters from the suburbs, to the further North for adventurous tourists and backpackers; to other cities, friends, family homes and summer-cottages, study, army conscription camps, and festive events. It is also recognised as a familiar meeting place for many, under the front arch, on the side steps, in its restaurants and bars.

In the context of the locative media workshop, the site of Rautatieasema was introduced as a 'boundary object': interpreted by different communities, with an acknowledgement and discussion of these differences, that allows a shared understanding to be formed; a common point of reference for conversation; a means of coordination and alignment, and of translation. It was the common locus for activity and interaction, to engage, document, and problematise notions of site-specificity and place. However, it was also a gathering for points of overlap between emerging media, performance and archaeological practices. Exploring relationships between critical fieldwork, site-specific performance, temporality, mediated memory, material culture, psycho-geography, collaborative and multiple- perspective documentation.

The locative media participants were encouraged to bring their own desired tools and technologies for gathering data: laptops, pens and sticky paper, digital movie/image cameras, mobile phones, handheld GPS, human voice, microphones and sound recorders. However, not to be forgotten but emphasised, the participants brought their body to the site of interest. Concerned with positioning, visibility and performance, we locate our physical being among others, negotiating the spatio-temporal context.

As part of this orientation the participants also brought their emotional and intellectual self to the site. Time, space and emotions are invested in fieldwork, connecting the personal, professional and political. Indeed it is difficult to disengage the situated and embodied self. Those specific identity and context perspectives brought - age, gender, sexuality, history, nationality, class, politic - mingles with the stories, subjectivities, and histories of others present in the field. By documenting other places and the people within, the participants wrote part of their own story in relation.

[*] Written by this author with reference to spoken-word fragments transcribed from DV (digital video) documentation of the final workshop-day presentations. These notes can be found online here: <http://apateroso.info/projects/rautatieasema/2004/fragments/>

PARTICIPANTS (from both workshops)

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<http://www.pixelache.ac/locative/2004/>

<http://www.muu.fi/signalprocess/>

<http://rixc.lv/tcm/>

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